



United States Department of the Interior



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In Reply Refer To:
3120 (UT920)

Memorandum

To: Kent Hoffman, Deputy State Director, Lands and Minerals, Utah
From: Brian Tritle, Field Manager, St. George Field Office, Utah
Subject: Recommendation to Defer the St. George Oil & Gas Lease Parcels.

Brian Tritle
5/25/17

Background:

The St. George Field Office posted the 2017 June Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale Environmental Analysis (EA) for public comment on January 10, 2017. The EA analyzed the potential leasing of three parcels (UT0517-042, UT0517-043, and UT0517-044) within close proximity to Zion National Park in Washington County. In response to requests from the National Park Service and other interested parties, BLM decided to extend the comment period by an additional 30 days. The extension of the comment period precluded the BLM from considering these parcels in the June 2017 Oil and Gas Lease Sale.

Issues Raised in Comments:

BLM received over 40,000 comments on the EA. Issues raised include potential impacts to Zion National Park's scenic view shed, soundscape, night skies, and air quality (Class I Air shed). Other issues raised include potential impacts to threatened and endangered species, lands with wilderness characteristics, and water quality. Utah's Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office provided comments to the field office expressing the need for additional stipulations prior to leasing the parcels. BLM also received Resolution No. R-2017-2143 from the Washington County Commission and comments from the town of Springdale (Resolution No. 2017-05) expressing opposition to the leasing of all considered parcels, along with comments expressing concern about the potential impacts mentioned above.

Stakeholders and commenters have expressed concern over the relevance of the 1999 St. George Field Office RMP. Visitation to Zion National Park and its surroundings has more than doubled since 1999. Rapid growth in visitation and within the communities near the parcels, rapid growth of recreational use on adjacent public lands, and rapid infrastructure development in all

of Washington County call into question the relevance of the socioeconomic analysis provided in the 1999 SGFO RMP and this EA.

Additionally, reinitiating Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for oil and gas leasing activities outside of the National Conservation Areas in the St. George Field Office is necessary.

Recommendation:

Based on the issues raised in the comments received from stakeholders and the public, and BLM's preliminary analysis, it is my recommendation to defer all three parcels until BLM is able to consider these parcels under the land use planning process.